

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Says Traffic Deaths on America's Highways Down Slightly, but Far Too Many Lives Lost Every Year

PRINCETON, N.J. -- U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters today announced that traffic deaths on U.S. roads were down slightly in 2006 according to preliminary figures, but cautioned that far too many lives continue to be lost.

While the number of road deaths is projected to have declined slightly nationwide from 43,443 in 2005 to 43,300 in 2006, "even one death is too many," Secretary Peters said. And over half of passenger vehicle occupants killed died unbuckled, the preliminary data shows.

"Bad things happen when people don't buckle up, and no one is immune from the damage and devastation that comes from not wearing a seat belt," Secretary Peters said. She also commended New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine for his work to educate drivers and other vehicle occupants about the need to buckle up, saying "perhaps his pictures and his words about his crash will inspire people to buckle up every time they get in the car, no excuses."

The Secretary noted that, as the summer driving seasons starts this weekend, police officers around the country will be on patrol looking for people who aren't buckling up. She added that the U.S. DOT supports states with millions of dollars in highway safety funds annually, including the nearly \$27 million being used to support seat belt enforcement efforts.

The preliminary 2006 fatality numbers released today project a 2006 fatality rate of 1.44 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT), down from 1.45 in 2005. During the same period, injuries dropped 6 percent from 2.7 million in 2005 to 2.54 million in 2006. Previous estimates show that highway crashes cost society \$230.6 billion a year, about \$820 per person.

The preliminary figures also show that between 2005 and 2006: overall alcohol-related fatalities increased 2.4 percent from 17,525 to 17,941; pedestrian deaths dropped slightly, from 4,881 to 4,768; and fatalities from large truck crashes dropped from 5,212 to 5,018, a 3.7 percent decline.

"The long Memorial Day weekend not only signals the start of summer, it should also serve as a stark reminder that buckling up can be a life-and-death proposition," Secretary Peters said.

The Department collects the crash statistics from the 50 states and the District of Columbia to produce the annual traffic fatality report. The final 2006 report, pending completion of data collection and analysis, will be available in late summer. The preliminary report is available at: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/810755.PDF>

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